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Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers

The aim of this article is to introduce a mother-centred mode of feminism—what I have called “matricentric feminism”—to consider the context and challenges of a mother-centred feminist theory and politics, and to suggest directions for future research. Motherhood, it could be said, is the unfinished business of feminism. Matricentric feminism seeks to make motherhood the business of feminism by positioning mothers’ needs and concerns as the starting point for a theory and politics on and for women’s empowerment. This repositioning is not to suggest that a matricentric feminism should replace traditional feminist thought; rather, it is to emphasize that the category of mother is distinct from the category of woman and that many of the problems mothers face—social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and so forth—are specific to women’s roles and identity as mothers. Indeed, mothers are oppressed under patriarchy as women and as mothers. Consequently, mothers need a matricentric mode of feminism organized from and for their particular identity and work as mothers. Indeed, a mother-centred feminism is needed because mothers—arguably more so than women in general—remain disempowered despite forty years of feminism. My work does not rationalize or defend the need for a mother-centred feminism, as it takes it as a given. Instead, this article endeavours to describe and discuss this mode of mother-focused feminism, which has emerged as a result of and in response to women’s specific identities and work as mothers.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf writes “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (1). For me, this quote serves to situate and frame what has been a passionate concern of mine over the past three-plus decades as I have sought to do feminism as a mother and do mothering as a feminist: namely, mothers need a feminism of their own. When I use the term “mothers,” I refer to individuals who engage in motherwork or, as Sara Ruddick theorized, maternal practice. Such a term is

not limited to biological mothers but to anyone who does the work of mothering as a central part of their life. The aim of this article is to introduce this specific mode of feminism—what I have called “matricentric feminism”—to consider the context and challenges of a mother-centred feminist theory and politics, and to suggest directions for future research.

Background and Context

The article works from one particular assumption: mothering matters and is central to the lives of women who are mothers. In saying this, I am not suggesting that mothering is all that matters or that it matters the most; I am suggesting that any understanding of mothers' lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming and being a mother shape a woman's sense of self and how she sees and lives in the world. Indeed, as Eva Feder Kitty emphasizes, “most women care for their dependents at some point, and for many women, this occupies the better part of their lives” (qtd. in Stephens 141). As a motherhood scholar, a director of a research centre on motherhood, an editor of a motherhood journal, and a publisher of a press on motherhood, I have talked to more mothers and read more motherhood scholarship than most, and I can say with confidence that for women who are mothers, mothering is a significant, if not a defining dimension of their lives, and that, arguably, maternity matters more than gender. I do not seek to substantiate these claims but rather take them as my starting point. Mothers need a feminism that puts motherhood at its centre.

Motherhood, it could be said, is the unfinished business of feminism. For example, a cursory review of recent scholarship on mothers and paid employment reveals that although women have made significant gains over the last three decades, mothers have not. Mothers in the paid labour force find themselves “mommy tracked,” as they make sixty cents for every dollar earned by full-time fathers in the U.S. (Williams 2). Indeed, today, the pay gap between mothers and nonmothers under thirty-five years is larger than the wage gap between young men and women (Crittenden 94). And although the “glass ceiling” and the “sticky floor” are still found in the workplace, most scholars argue that it is the “maternal wall” that impedes and hinders most women's progress in the workplace today. As Ann Crittenden writes “many childless women under the age of thirty-five believe that all the feminist battles have been won ... [but] once a woman has a baby, the egalitarian office party is over” (88).

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thought; rather, it is to emphasize that the category of mother is distinct from the category of woman and that many of the problems mothers face—social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and so forth—are specific to women’s role and identity as mothers. Indeed, mothers are oppressed under patriarchy as women and as mothers. Consequently, mothers need a matricentric mode of feminism organized from and for their particular identity and work as mothers. Indeed, a mother-centred feminism is needed because mothers—arguably more so than women in general—remain disempowered despite forty years of feminism. My work does not rationalize or defend the need for a mother-centred feminism, as it takes it as a given. Instead, this article endeavours to describe and discuss this mode of mother-focused feminism—what I have termed “matricentric feminism”—which has emerged as a result of and in response to women’s specific identities and work as mothers.

I use the term “matricentric” to define and describe a mother-centred mode of feminism. Feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter uses the term “gynocentric” to signify a woman-centred perspective; similarly, I use matricentric to convey a mother-centred perspective. The choice to use the word “matricentric” over “maternal” and to use the term “matricentric feminism” instead of “maternal feminism” is done to distinguish a mother-focused feminism from the theory and politics of maternalism. Writer Judith Stadtman Tucker argues that maternalism “conforms to the dominant ideology of motherhood and emphasizes the importance of maternal well-being to the health and safety of children.” “Maternalism,” she continues, “overlaps with what has been called ‘difference feminism’—particularly the idea that women are ‘naturally’ or intuitively more empathic, less exploitive, and more closely attuned to relational ambience than men” (2). Likewise, Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, writing in *the Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, says the following:

maternalism, like paternalism, is an ideology and philosophy. It asserts that “mother knows best” and that women, as a group, maintain a set of ideas, beliefs or experiences that reflect their motherly knowledge and motherly strengths. Maternalism suggests that women are (and should be) the moral conscience of humanity and asserts women’s legitimate investment in political affairs through this emphasis. (II: 712)

Patrice DiQuinzio further elaborates that “maternalist politics refers to political activism and political movements that invoke motherhood as the basis of women’s agency” (“The Politics of the Mothers Movement in the United States” 58).

A matricentric perspective must not to be confused with a maternalist one. Although some perspectives in matricentric feminism may be considered maternalist, they are largely limited to the activism of certain motherhood

organizations. Moreover, matricentric feminism understands motherhood to be socially and historically constructed, and positions mothering more as a practice than an identity. As well, central to matricentric feminist theory is a critique of the maternalist stance that positions maternity as the basis of female identity; as well, matricentric feminism challenges the assumption that maternity is natural to women (i.e., all women naturally know how to mother) and that the work of mothering is driven by instinct rather than intelligence and developed by habit rather than skill. Although matricentric feminism does hold a mother-centred perspective, it does not advance a maternalist argument or agenda. Thus, matricentric feminism marks the crucial difference between a focus on mothers from a politics of maternalism.

When discussing matricentric feminism, I draw on the concept of a matrifocal narrative, particularly as it has been developed in maternal literary theory. In her introduction to *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Marianne Hirsch queries why in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, the voice of Jocasta, Oedipus' mother, is missing, and she connects this narrative silence to a larger literary lacuna: "In asking where the story of Jocasta is in the story of Oedipus, I am asking not only where the stories of women are in men's plots, but where the stories of mothers are in the plots of sons and daughters" (4). She concludes that "clearly, to know Jocasta's maternal story ... we would have to begin with the mother" (5). Drawing on Hirsch, Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy emphasize in *Narrating Maternity* that even among the limited number of fictional or theoretical texts that do "begin with the mother in her own right, from her own perspective ... [they] seldom hold fast to a maternal perspective; further when texts do maintain this perspective, readers and critics tend to suppress the centrality of mothering" (2-3). Daly and Reddy have coined the term "daughter-centricity" to describe the perspective wherein "we learn less about what it is like to mother than about what it is like to be mothered, even when the author has had both experiences" (2). Within the last three decades, as motherhood studies has emerged as a distinct and established academic discipline, this daughter-centricity has been countered and corrected in both fiction and theory. Indeed, a central aim of motherhood studies is to articulate and theorize "the voice of the mother"—that is, to analyze becoming and being a mother from the perspective and subjectivity of mothers themselves. Adrienne Rich concludes *Of Woman Born* with these words: "The words are being spoken now, are being written down, the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through" (239). Whether such "unmasking" (Maushart) is conveyed by way of a sociological study of mothers or in a popular motherhood memoir, feminist writers and scholars endeavour to unmask motherhood by documenting the lived reality of mothering. In so doing, they counter the daughter-centricity, described by Daly and Reddy, to create and compose what I term a "matrifocal narrative."

My use of the term matrifocal is drawn from Miriam Johnson's discussion of matrifocality in *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives*. Matrifocal societies, she writes, "tend to have greater gender equality because of the power of a maternal paradigm" (226). She continues with the following:

In these societies, regardless of the particular type of kinship system, women play roles of cultural and social significance and define themselves less as wives than as mothers.... Matrifocality however, does not refer to domestic maternal dominance so much as it does to the relative cultural prestige of the image of the mother, a role that is culturally elaborated and valued. Mothers are also structurally central in that the mother as a status "has some degree of control over the kin unit's economic resources and is critically involved in kin-related decision making processes." It is not the absence of males (males may be quite present) but the centrality of women as mothers and sisters that makes a society matrifocal. (226)

A matrifocal narrative, borrowing from Johnson's terminology, is one in which a mother plays a role of cultural and social significance and in which motherhood is thematically elaborated and valued; it is structurally central to the plot. In other words—and to draw on the work of Hirsh, Daly, and Reddy—matrifocal narratives "begin with the mother in her own right, from her own perspective," and they "hold fast to a maternal perspective; in addition, a matrifocal reading attends to and accentuates the maternal thematic in any given text.

Maternal writing, as Emily Jeremiah has noted, "entails a publicizing of maternal experience, and it subverts the traditional notion of mother as an instinctual, purely corporeal being. It is thus to be understood as a key tool in the redefinition of maternity in which feminists are engaged" (231). "It is impossible," writes Patrice DiQuinzio, "for feminist theory to avoid the issue of motherhood, and it is impossible for feminist theory to resolve it" (*Impossibility of Motherhood* xx). However, I suggest that a matrifocal perspective that unmasks motherhood and redefines maternity allows for these encounters and explorations.

Not only is matricentric feminism matrifocal in its focus, it is also multi- and interdisciplinary in its perspective. Matricentric feminist theory draws from many academic disciplines—including anthropology, history, literary studies, sociology, philosophy, psychology, sexuality studies, and women's studies—as well as from the established schools of academic feminism. Indeed, far from being an island unto its own, matricentric feminism is informed by traditional schools of academic feminism and its most prominent theorists: womanist and African American feminism (bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins); liberal feminism (Ann Crittenden); psychoanalytic feminism

(Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin); queer-lesbian feminism (Baba Copper); cultural-difference feminism (Adrienne Rich and Mielle Chandler); socialist feminism (Mary O'Brien); and third-wave feminism (Ariel Gore). As an example, matricentric feminism is informed by the African American feminist commitment to the epistemological importance of lived experience while also being informed by third-wave feminism's commitment to intersectional analyses.

I am frequently asked what matricentric feminism is. As a new and emergent feminism, it is difficult to define matricentric feminism other than to say that it is explicitly matrifocal in its perspective and emphasis—it begins with the mother and takes seriously the work of mothering—and that it is multidisciplinary and multitheoretical in its perspective. I gesture towards a possible definition by listing what I see as the central and governing principles and aims of matricentric feminism:

- asserts that the topic of mothers, mothering, and motherhood is deserving of serious and sustained scholarly inquiry;
- regards mothering as work that is important and valuable to society but emphasizes that the essential task of mothering is not, and should not be, the sole responsibility and duty of mothers;
- contests, challenges, and counters the patriarchal oppressive institution of motherhood and seeks to imagine and implement a maternal identity and practice that is empowering to mothers;
- seeks to correct the child centredness that defines much of the scholarship and activism on motherhood and seeks to develop research and activism from the experience and the perspective of mothers;
- commits to social change and social justice, and regards mothering as a socially engaged enterprise and a site of power, wherein mothers can and do create social change through childrearing and activism;
- understands mothering and motherhood to be culturally determined and variable, and is committed to exploring the diversity of maternal experience across race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, age, and geographical location; and
- endeavours to establish maternal theory and motherhood studies as an autonomous, independent, and legitimate scholarly disciplines.

This list is only partial and provisional. It is my hope that future scholarship will lead to a more substantive and robust definition of matricentric feminism to create a feminism, in the words of feminist writer and activist Marilyn Waring, for which mothers and mothering count.

Controversies and Challenges

Matricentric feminism, however, has yet to be incorporated into the field of academic feminism. In making this claim, I am not saying no feminist scholarship on motherhood exists; rather, matricentric feminism remains peripheral to academic feminism. Over the last three-plus decades as a motherhood researcher and publisher, I have heard countless stories from motherhood scholars about how their work has been ignored, dismissed, invalidated, or trivialized by academic feminists; how the women's studies conferences they attend have few, if any papers, on motherhood; how motherhood is seldom a topic of discussion in women's studies classrooms and rarely included in academic feminist textbooks; and how articles on motherhood or reviews of motherhood books are all but absent in the leading women's studies journals. My 2016 study of the place of motherhood over the past ten years—in contexts such as National Women's Studies Association conference panels as well as in top feminist journals such as *Signs*, *Frontiers*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Feminist Studies*, and *Gender and Society*, and in gender and women's studies textbooks and syllabi—has confirmed this antidotal evidence, as only 1 percent to less than 3 percent of the content is devoted to the topic of motherhood (*Matricentric Feminism*). Given that 80 percent of women become mothers in their lifetime, there is an evident disconnect between the minimal representation of motherhood in academic feminism and the actual lives of most women.

A demand for a theory and practice based on a specific identity of women is hardly an innovative or radical claim. Over the last forty-plus years, many groups of women have argued that mainstream feminism—largely understood to be liberal feminism—has not adequately represented their perspectives or needs. Women of colour, for example, have advocated that feminism must address the intersectionality of their oppression as racialized women, a feminism now known as womanism; women from the Global South have called for the development of a theory of global feminism; and queer, lesbian, bi, and trans women have supported the growth of queer feminist theory and activism. Likewise, the development of third-wave feminism in the 1990s grew out of young women's sense of alienation from the aims of second-wave feminism. When such women demanded a feminist theory of their own, the larger feminist movement acknowledged, albeit often reluctantly, that such women had been excluded from the larger canon of feminist thought. Feminist theory was subsequently revised to include these different positions and perspectives within feminism. Most introduction to women's studies textbooks or courses now include chapters or units on socialist feminism, global feminism, queer feminism, third-wave feminism, and womanism, and these perspectives and topics are well represented at women's studies conferences and in women's studies journals.

However, as mothers began to call for feminism for and about mothers over the last decade and to ask for its inclusion in an academic feminism, their calls were not met with the same respect or recognition. More often than not, their claims were dismissed, trivialized, disparaged, and ridiculed: why would mothers need such a mother-centred feminist perspective? The question implies that mothers do not have needs or concerns separate from their larger identity as women. It troubles me deeply that feminists can understand the intersectionality of gendered oppression when it comes to race, class, sexuality, and geographical location but no so for maternity. But I would argue—and I suspect most mothers would agree—that maternity needs to be likewise understood in terms of intersectional theory. The category of mother is distinct from the category of woman: many of the problems mothers face—social, economic, political, cultural, and psychological—are specific to their work and identity as mothers. Mothers, in other words, do not live simply as women but as mother women, just as Black women do not live simply as women but as racialized women. Moreover, mothers' oppression and resistance under patriarchy are shaped by their maternal identity, just as Black women's oppression and resistance are shaped by their racialized identity. Thus, mothers need a feminism of their own—one that positions the concerns of mothers at the starting point for a theory and politics of empowerment. For me, this seems self-evident. Why then is maternity not understood to be a subject position and, hence, not theorized as with other subject positions in terms of the intersectionality of gendered oppression and resistance? Why do we not recognize mothers' specific perspectives as we do for other women, whether they are queer, working class, racialized, and so forth? Why do mothers and mothering not count or matter?

In my 2016 book, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*, I consider various reasons for what I term the “disavowal of motherhood” in academic feminism. Here I share two of these considerations: the confusion of mothering with motherhood and the conflation of maternalism, and hence gender essentialism, with matricentric feminism. Samira Kawash in her review article on motherhood argues that “the marginalization of motherhood in feminist thought over the last 15 years was a political rejection of maternalist politics constructed as a backlash to feminism and the result of dramatic upheavals in feminist theory” (971). Indeed, Kawash argues that “by the late 1990s difference feminism had been eclipsed and was no longer a serious topic of discussion in feminist graduate programs or in the academic feminist press.” “The deconstruction of ‘woman’ and the post structuralist accounts of gender and power,” she continues, “left motherhood to the side, an embarrassing theoretical relic of an earlier naïve view of the essentialist woman, and her shadow, the essential mother” (971). Building on Kawash's argument, I argue that it is more precisely a misreading of maternity and

maternalism in matricentric feminism that has resulted in the disavowal of motherhood in and by academic feminism.

Confusing Mothering with Motherhood

It is my view that the disavowal of motherhood in academic feminism is the result of a larger and pervasive feminist discomfort with all things maternal and, more specifically, the result of confusing the institution of motherhood with the experience of mothering. Much of second-wave feminism—in particular that of liberal and radical-libertarian feminism—views motherhood as a significant, if not the determining, cause of women’s oppression under patriarchy. As Rosemarie Putnam Tong notes in her second edition of *Feminist Thought*, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, a central liberal feminist text, “advised women to become like men” (31). The now-infamous quote from *The Feminine Mystique*—“the problem that has no name”—quickly became a trope for the dissatisfaction supposedly felt by stay-at-home mothers. Friedan states that “in lieu of more meaningful goals, these women spent too much time cleaning their already tidy homes, improving their already attractive appearances, and indulging their already spoiled children.” (69-70). Moreover, Friedan argues that “contemporary women needed to find meaningful work in the full-time, public workforce” (22). Along the same lines, radical-libertarian feminist Shulamith Firestone claims that “the material basis for the sexual/political ideology of female submission and male domination was rooted in the reproductive roles of men and women” (qtd. in Tong 52). Elsewhere, Firestone writes the following:

No matter how much educational, legal, and political equality women achieve and no matter how many women enter public industry, nothing fundamental will change for women as long as natural reproduction remains the rule and artificial or assisted reproduction the exception. Natural reproduction is neither in women’s best interests nor in those of the children so reproduced. The joy of giving birth—invoked so frequently in this society—is a patriarchal myth. In fact, pregnancy is barbaric, and natural childbirth is at best necessary and tolerable and at worst like shirting a pumpkin. (92)

For Friedan and Firestone, motherhood is a patriarchal institution that causes women’s oppression, and, thus, for them, the feminist solution is to disavow and denounce motherhood.

However, as motherhood scholars and mothers alike have rightly argued, such reasoning is deeply flawed in its failure to take into account the important difference between the institution of motherhood and women’s experiences of mothering. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich distinguishes between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: “the potential

relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children”; and “the institution—which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control” (13). The term “motherhood” refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood, which is male defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, whereas the word “mothering” refers to women’s experiences of mothering and is female defined and potentially empowering to women. The reality of patriarchal motherhood, thus, must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of feminist mothering. To critique the institution of motherhood, therefore, is “not an attack on the family or on mothering except as defined and restricted under patriarchy” (Rich 14). In other words, whereas motherhood as an institution is a male-defined site of oppression, women’s own experiences of mothering can be a source of power. It has long been recognized among scholars of motherhood that Rich’s distinction between mothering and motherhood was what enabled feminists to recognize that motherhood is not naturally, necessarily, or inevitably oppressive. Rather, mothering, freed from motherhood, could be experienced as a site of empowerment and a location of social change if, to use Rich’s words, women became “outlaws from the institution of motherhood.” However, in much of academic feminism, this crucial difference between the institution and the experience is not recognized or understood. As a result, mothering becomes confused with motherhood, and maternity is regarded solely and exclusively as a patriarchal entity.

Conflating Matricentric Feminism with Maternalism and Gender Essentialism

A matricentric perspective is often confused with a maternalist one. Matricentric feminism, as already discussed, understands motherhood to be socially and historically constructed and positions mothering more as a practice than an identity. Central to matricentric feminism is a critique of the maternalist stance that positions maternity as basic to and the basis of female identity; it challenges the assumption that maternity is natural to women (i.e., all women naturally know how to mother) and that the work of mothering is driven by instinct rather than intelligence and developed by habit rather than skill. Although matricentric feminism does hold a matrifocal perspective and insists that mothering does matter, it does not advance a maternalist argument or agenda.

However, matricentric feminism—in its focus on a gendered experience that of mothering (and the related ones of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding)—does force us to address the thorny issue of gender difference. Feminist theory, with the notable exception of cultural-difference feminism, positions gender difference as central to, if not the cause of, women’s oppression. Liberal feminists advocate what has been called “sameness feminism,” wherein women become more like men; radical-libertarian feminists promote

androgyny; and poststructuralist feminists seek to destabilize and deconstruct gender difference all together. Indeed, as Niamh Moore notes, “challenging biological determinism and other essentialisms has been a crucial policy strategy for feminists” (qtd. in Stephens 141). Thus, because feminists are uncomfortable with anything that underscores gender difference and suggests essentialism (i.e., men are naturally this way, and women are naturally this way), motherhood becomes problematic, as it more than anything else is what marks gender difference: only biological females can biologically become mothers. And because gender difference is seen as structuring and maintaining male dominance, many feminists seek to downplay and disavow anything that marks this difference—the main one, of course, being motherhood. For many feminists, to call attention to women’s specific gendered subjectivity as a mother is to subscribe to an essentialist viewpoint: acknowledging and affirming what is seen as marking and maintaining gender difference and, hence, the oppression of women. Indeed, as Julie Stephens writes in *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking*: “the primary focus of the second-wave feminist movement has been one long struggle against essentialism, whether this be biological, cultural or ideological. This makes any discussion linking women and care, or mothering and nurture, particularly troubling” (10). Consequently, as Stephens goes on to argue, “any activism done in the name of the maternal will be unsettling, particularly for those who perceive feminism as primarily a struggle against essentialism” (141).

I agree that gender is constructed—sex does not equal gender or as Simone de Beauvoir said “one is not born a woman but made one”—and thus people cannot define themselves or limit their lives to that which is socially constructed by gender. However, I likewise believe that feminists should not disavow motherhood to facilitate this destabilizing of gender. I believe it is possible to simultaneously argue that gender is constructed and that motherhood matters and that maternity is integral to a mother’s woman’s sense of self and her experience of the world. In my view, the apprehension over gender difference is the elephant in the room of academic feminism; it has shut down necessary and needed conversations about important—and yes gendered—biological dimensions of women’s lives: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and mothering. Mothers can no longer talk about their reproductive identities and experiences without being called essentialist. But maternal scholars do not reduce women’s sense of self to motherhood, nor do they say that this is what makes her a woman or that motherhood is more important than other variables that constitute her self. They say only that motherhood matters and that it is central and integral to understanding the lives of women as mothers. Thus, mothers need a feminism, in both theory and practice, for and about their identities and experiences as mothers.

Direction for Future Research

Motherhood studies as an area of scholarship," Kawash writes, "is on precarious grounds: ignored by mainstream academic feminism, fragmented and discontinuous in the academic margins" (986). In making this argument, Kawash uses as her example York University's refusal to provide institutional funding for the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) and the resulting closure of the association in 2010. Kawash writes that "the fact that neither the university system nor the institution of academic feminism appears willing to support a scholarly community and research program that explicitly foregrounds mothering is discouraging" (986). However, as Kawash goes on to argue, "but the fact is, even before York pulled the plug, the established academic community completely ignored the work of ARM. Neither O'Reilly's work nor the *Demeter* volumes were reviewed in any significant feminist journals, and JARM had few institutional subscribers" (986). Thus, "while motherhood has been an energizing topic in the past decade," Kawash argues, "there has been little boundary-crossing movement between academic and popular discussion, and the movement between feminist studies and motherhood studies has been only in one direction" (986). But Kawash concludes with the following:

Feminist theorists, scholars, and writers, as well as feminist mother activists, have a lot to say to each other, and a lot to learn from each other, about motherhood. Motherhood studies needs the perspectives and commitments of feminism as well as the institutional resources that feminism and women's studies have accumulated over the past four decades. At the same time, feminism cannot possibly hope to remain relevant without acknowledging motherhood in all its contradictions and complexities. (986-87)

Indeed, in the words of maternal theorist Patrice DiQuinzio, since "mothering in all its diverse forms remains an important aspect of women's lives and that decisions about whether, when, and how to mother continues to face almost all women, feminism cannot claim to give an adequate account of women's lives and to represent women's needs and interests if it ignores the issue of mothering" ("Mothering and Feminism" 545).

Conclusion

In this article, I have introduced matricentric feminism, discussed the disavowal of motherhood in academic feminism, and suggested possible explanation for its exclusion. However, despite the disavowal of motherhood in academic feminism, we do have a feminist theory and movement of our own. But matricentric feminism must be more than acknowledged as a

legitimate, viable, and independent school of feminist thought; it must be integrated into mainstream academic feminism. But how do we accomplish this? We need more women doing motherhood scholarship and more mother professors in academe. We demand that matricentric feminism have a chapter of its own as do other schools of feminism theory—queer, global, womanist, third wave—in our feminist theory readers, that introduction to women’s studies courses and textbooks include sections on motherhood, that women’s journals and conferences include more papers on motherhood, and that more books on motherhood are reviewed. We must continuously challenge the conflation of mothering with motherhood within academic feminism as well as counter the association of matricentric feminism with gender essentialism. And decisively and urgently, we must interrupt the received narrative of academic feminism—in particular its normalization of the genderless and autonomous subject—in order to foreground the centrality of women’s reproductive identities and lives and the importance of care in our larger culture. Indeed, as Ann Marie Slaughter comments, “the bottom-line message is that we are never going to get gender equality between men and women unless we value the work of care as much as we value paid work. That’s the unfinished business” (qtd. in McCarthy). Finally and most important, we must demand that matricentric feminists be recognized and respected as the feminists that they are and that their feminism, that of matricentric feminism, have a room of its own in the larger home of academic feminism.

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